

THE LAND EXCHANGE PROJECT

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The Land Exchange Project

Zionist political thought continues to propose projects based on the eradication of the Palestinians as a people or, at the very least, their marginalisation inside the state of Israel. So-called ‘population transfer’ is a fundamental and unequivocally non-negotiable principle of political Zionism. It has been used to devastating effect for more than sixty years to carry out what historians have called the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Palestinians from their land.

With increasing discussion about ‘final status’ issues such as Israel-Palestine borders; Palestinian refugees; the city of Jerusalem; and Israeli settlements, the Zionists establishment has now added a new dimension to its concept of ‘transfer’. This has come to be known as ‘geographical transfer’ and is intended to destroy Palestine as a viable homeland while still referring to it as a land. It is based upon the concept of an exchange of land between Israel and the Palestinian Authority within the context of any final status discussions, so as to allow illegal Israeli settlements to officially end up as part of the Zionist state.

During the fourth Herzliya Conference in 2003, Israel’s Foreign Minister and leader of the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel our home) Party, Avigdor Lieberman, attempted to justify the idea of abandoning the Arab towns in the Triangle (a group of Israeli Arab/Palestinian towns adjacent to the Armistice Line of 1948) to an independent Palestinian state. Lieberman declared that he was not presenting a peace plan but a security plan, and he is not looking for a barrier to the establishment of a Palestinian state, but for a partner to “solve” the issue of Israeli Arabs. According to the Foreign Minister, in order for Israel to maintain its identity as a “Jewish state”, the notion of a “bi-national state” must be dropped. The concept of one state for all citizens has become increasingly prominent following the ‘death of two-state solution’; according to Lieberman, the exchange of land is one of the means to achieving this “solution”. Lieberman’s 2003 Herzliya proposal was basically a rehash of the plan adopted at the conference two years earlier.

At the May 2011 conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the most prominent pro-Israel lobby group in the United States, US President Barack Obama repeated his call for a Palestinian state within the June 1967 borders, with an exchange of land to take into account the “new demographic facts on the ground”; that is, the currently illegal Israeli settlements across the occupied West Bank.

The idea of land exchange originated in the Camp David talks in July 2000 between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. The Israeli delegation proposed to swap one of two areas; Umm al-Fahm and part of its wider district, or the Halotsa area adjacent to the Gaza Strip, in exchange for the major settlements in the West Bank. The idea of including Halotsa in the proposal was to try to entice the Palestinian negotiators to opt for Umm al-Fahm as Halotsa is a



barren area with no water; reports in 2008 claimed that it is where toxic waste from Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor is burned.

The Palestinians at Camp David agreed on the concept of land exchange and asked for land adjacent to the West Bank. The then Israeli Foreign Minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, told Haaretz on 14 September 2001 that at Camp David, he had the chance to see a Palestinian map containing a swap of less than 2.8% of the area of the West Bank in return for land at a ratio of 1 to 1.5%. The US team present at Camp David expressed admiration for the land exchange idea and introduced America's vision of what it might entail: the return to the Palestinian Authority of 96 to 97 percent of the West Bank plus 1% of 1948-occupied territory (i.e. Israel) or 94% of the West Bank plus 3%.

In a 2005 article, Uzi Arad, a former political adviser to Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, suggested a "long-term plan" to rid Israel of the Arab towns and cities of Umm al-Fahm, Wadi Ara (Nahal Iron), Al-Tayiba, Al-Tira, Kafr Qasim and other places adjacent to the Green Line (the Armistice line), in exchange for Jewish settlements in the West Bank, including Ariel, Gush Etzion and Ma'ale Adumim.

Arad proposed to pay compensation to the Arab citizens affected by the "transfer"; they would also retain all the social rights that were accumulated for them in Israel.

Israel's proposals for the exchange of land were presented again at the Annapolis Conference in November 2007 attended by the then US President, George W. Bush. The most notable plans were:

1. In July 2007, Israeli President Shimon Peres proposed that an independent Palestinian state be established along the 1967 borders plus and minus land exchanged totalling 5% of the West Bank and Jerusalem. Israel would keep the settlements and independent Palestine would be compensated by land of the same value, including some land from Israel already inhabited by Palestinians.
2. According to Haim Ramon, the Israeli deputy prime minister in September 2007, "Israel has decided on its borders in the West Bank from the moment that the separation wall was established." Thus, in his view, between 3 and 8 percent of the West Bank will be annexed by Israel. The Palestinians will be compensated with similar areas inside the Green Line (i.e. inside Israel).

Both plans kill two birds with one stone, merging the settlement blocs in the West Bank and ridding Israel of tens of thousands of its Palestinian citizens.

3. The eight points that were included in the "Declaration of Principles" between Israel and the Palestinian Authority were to be the basis of the agreement in the autumn conference. The second point stated: "an unarmed Palestinian state to be established,



its borders to be based on the maps of 1967. Such borders are to be strictly agreed upon according to security needs, demographic developments and humanitarian supplies. This will thus open the door to an exchange of land at the ratio of 1:1 while keeping the settlement blocs in Israel's hands."

4. One of the main points discussed at the Herzliya Conference in 2008 was the issue of land exchange *in the region* to "protect" Israel as a "Jewish State". A paper presented by academics, Uzi Arad and Gideon Biger, called for Israel to keep the large settlement blocs in the West Bank and Jordan Valley in return for giving the Palestinians lands in current Israel, for example those with a large Palestinian population such as [Umm Al Fahm](#)

The meaning of land exchange

The concept of an exchange of land means a return to the 1949 armistice (the "Green") line also known as the 1967 borders (i.e. pre-June 1967) plus the annexation of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. At no time have discussions about land exchange included the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Despite calls for the application of international law, which would allow such a return, the whole process is dictated by Israel and the USA.

Land exchange is not an innocent negotiator's request; after all, Israel wants to overturn international law with regard to the fact that the West Bank and Gaza are occupied Palestinian lands. It wants to reverse the advisory decision of the International Court of Justice that these lands are occupied in their entirety and Israel must withdraw from them; and that the "separation" wall is contrary to international law and must be removed, with compensation for the damage it has caused.

Israel wants to revoke established legal norms and keep the wall to curb the size of a Palestinian state which would actually lack contiguity. The Zionist state was successful with such a limiting agreement in its peace treaty of 1979 with Egypt; Israel's military withdrew completely from Sinai, but Egyptian sovereignty over its own land was left incomplete to varying degrees in three sectors, depending on their proximity to Israel.

The issue has started a big debate. When Aluf Benn's article "Olmert's plan for peace was published in Haaretz in December 2009, it was accompanied by a copy of the land-swap map which had been presented to Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas. A copy of the map was not given to Abbas unless he agreed to give his signature in approval. The point was to raise the issue with US and Arab diplomats. The map was no secret, having already been published in the newsletters of the Foundation for Middle East Peace a year earlier. The officer who drew up the plan was Israel's former brigade Commander in Gaza, Shaul Arieli; he placed it as a part of the Geneva Initiative signed by Yossi Beilin and Abed Rabbo.



Although Israel wants to exchange land that it occupied in 1948 for land that it occupied in 1967, in reality it owns neither. The Israeli government obviously believes that through the mechanism of a land swap some degree of legitimacy will be afforded to its occupation of the land, both in 1948 and in 1967. Possession of occupied land does not signify or confer ownership. Thus, Israel has no legal right to swap or exchange any land unless the owner of the land actually agrees to it. Palestinians are confident that such agreement will not be given.

Olmert's plan, of course, basically confiscates Palestinian properties which have the misfortune to be located between the apartheid/separation wall and the 1949 armistice lines, including those in occupied East Jerusalem. The ex-Prime Minister thus believes that Israel's borders are to be the path of the wall. This means the annexation of 369,830 dunums (1 dunum = 1000m²) of the West Bank to Israel on top of the 68,720 dunums already taken from Arab Jerusalem (annexed illegally by Israel in June 1967), making a total of 438,550 dunums.

Ironically, Israel always wanted to expand the area in the Triangle, the rights to which were waived to the nascent state in March 1949 by Jordan's King Abdullah (the present king's grandfather) under the threat of Israel occupying the entire West Bank. An area totalling 375,000 dunums and 70 villages, with a population of 100,000 inhabitants in 1949, came under Israeli rule. This is the area, which was subsequently annexed by Israel, which has turned into a nightmare for the Zionists due to the growing national spirit of the country's Palestinian citizens.

The armistice agreement between Israel and Jordan dated early April 1949 states that Jordan has the right to replace the lands ceded to Israel with other lands in Alvatour (in the District of Bisan) and in the Hebron area, while Israel was committed to pay the costs of a new road between Qalqilya and Tulkarm in order to restore contact between both cities lost due to the Triangle territory waiver.

Of course, nothing of the sort ever happened; the cost of the road was not reimbursed, nor has the Alvatour land been restored, nor has land in the Hebron district been handed over. The fact that the Alvatour territory was Arab land in 1949 in any case but Israel went ahead and annexed it is astonishing.



Olmert's Plan and what was on offer by Israel in exchange for the ceding of parts of historic Palestine is as follows:

1. The West Bank: The West Bank was subject to expansion in the Hebron district by 190,000 dunums of land which was and is still barren. This area has no Arab villages except one (Atir/Um el-Hiran) which is not recognised by Israel. The village has no water and no access to the Dead Sea. So Israel would not lose anything by its transfer to "Palestine". To the west of Hebron, Israel proposes an expansion of 12,000 dunums, also barren land, so that no Jewish settlements in the region will be affected. Observers of Nakba history know that the armistice line in the Hebron district, from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea was more or less arbitrary; there was no battle, fight or argument around its path, with either Jordan or Egypt, both of which had forces to defend the region. The armistice line could have been fixed to the west of its current location, so that Fallujah and Beersheba would have been in the West Bank, but neglect led to the current situation.
2. Jerusalem: The proposed line around Jerusalem and Latrun is the second attempt to seize Arab land. The first was executed successfully in 1949 when Moshe Dayan pushed for the armistice line to include the west of Jerusalem, Beit Safafa, the Walaja territory and the Jaffa – Jerusalem railway in Israel. The second attempt is underway to create Jewish/Israeli "Greater Jerusalem".
3. Gaza: Gaza's story is no less catastrophic than the West Bank's. The real armistice line signed by Egypt on February 24, 1949 gave the Gaza Strip an area of 555 square kilometres, more than 200 more than the current area. A secret deal was struck between Israel and Egypt resulting in "the co-existence agreement" of February 1950, under the pretext of maintaining security. In fact, this was signed to prevent Palestinians from returning to their homes across the armistice line; the Israelis called them "infiltrators". According to the agreement, the "armistice line" was shifted to its current route, inside the real line agreed earlier. It is interesting to note that "the co-existence agreement" was clear that the original armistice agreement was not affected by what was meant to be a temporary agreement. However, there was no request to return the line to its original route between 1950 and 1967 when the Israelis occupied Gaza.

Olmert's plan included the expansion of the Gaza Strip by 64.5 of the 200km² that were already seized by the above secret deal unknown to the Palestinians. Thus, Olmert proposal was to give back what was (and is) already the Palestinians' by right in any case. As in the Hebron district, the expansion of the Gaza Strip does not necessitate the removal of any settlement. Those which were built on Gaza's land stolen in 1950 will not be affected at all.



This has always been Israel's modus operandi; seizing land by force or deception before offering the real owners a small part back in return for them to drop the claim to the whole area.

It looks as if the US has more or less adopted the Olmert proposals. Maariv and Hayat reported in 2010 that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pleaded during a press conference with Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Gouda, to "end the conflict" with a Palestinian state along with "exchanging lands on a friendly basis and achieving the Israeli target of a Jewish state with recognised secure borders". The reference to a distinctly "Jewish State" gives Israel the green light to "transfer" people along with the land in any agreement and thus does the [ethnic cleansing](#) of Palestine continue unabated.

Netanyahu's offer to the Palestinian Authority

Following Olmert, current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made his own offer to the Palestinian Authority. It was an offer similar to the previous one, but some amendments had been incorporated into it.

(As usual, Netanyahu's proposal began by setting out the mantra of Israel's "security considerations",) necessitating a demilitarised Palestinian state with only a lightly-armed police force; Israeli control of the borders, border crossings, airspace, telecommunications and the Jordan Valley, where Israeli troops will be deployed. Netanyahu insists that Israel must control the Jordan Valley and the surrounding mountains to ensure control of the airspace and guarantee that weapons smuggling and "infiltration of militants" cannot take place. Israel will also prohibit an "independent state" of Palestine from signing security agreements with third parties.

Moreover, Netanyahu proposed the exchange of 400,000 acres of the Negev Desert along the Egyptian border, in return for populated areas (i.e. illegal settlements) in the occupied West Bank. He noted the following potential swaps:

1. The exchange of territories under Israeli control near Jenin in the West Bank.
2. The Triangle area, including the densely populated Arab towns of Umm el-Fahm, Tayiba and Wadi Ara.

Israel wants to keep the following:

1. The area around Jerusalem, which begins along the Green Line from Beit Horon in the north to Gush Etzion in the south. It includes the settlement blocs of Giv'at Ze'ev, Pisgat Ze'ev, kfar Aanot, Adam, Ma'ale Adumim, Gilo, Rachel's Tomb (Kevar Rakhel) and Beitar Illit. The route will head to Jericho and then up to the Jordan Valley. Thus, there will be a virtual separation between the Central and South Palestinian areas of the West Bank, with no territorial contiguity between them.



2. The second zone starts with a clump under Israeli sovereignty, along the Green Line, in the entrances to Beit Horon in the south and passing through the settlements of Kiryat Sefer, Hashmonaim (Ramat Modi'in), Matityahu, Beit Aryeh-Ofarim and Alfei Menashe, wrapping itself around Qalqilya and ending in the settlement of Tzofim (Zufin). This clustering forms a barrier between the Ramallah area and the Green Line, puts the areas of the Palestinian Authority away from the centre of the Gush Dan area, includes part of the west groundwater well and forms a backdrop to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport. This path goes across the West Bank to the Jordan Valley and includes settlements such as Elkana, Karnei Shomron, Immanuel, Ariel and Alei Zahav. When it reaches the Jordan Valley, it meets a "green" cluster, which will temporarily be under Israeli sovereignty.
3. The third region includes all the northern Jordan Valley settlements. This cluster locates generally on the northern part of the Allon Road and descends eastward towards the Jordan Valley Road. The full length between the Jordan Valley Road and the River Jordan is under full Israeli sovereignty. It starts from the area of Gush Etzion along the Green Line, cutting territory from large Palestinian villages and goes south along the Green Line and includes settlements such as Eshkolot and Shim'a before rising towards the Dead Sea. As the Israeli map has placed Hebron and the settlement of Kiryat Arba inside the Palestinian bloc, the southern sector extends deep into the Palestinian area with a narrow sector (between a kilometre and several metres wide) into Kiryat Arba and the city of Hebron.

According to Netanyahu, the Israelis have two proposals regarding control of the Jordan Valley:

1. The first is to divide sovereignty over the Jordan Valley between the Palestinians (although this will be "leased" to the Israelis) and Israel; the latter would be a narrow strip along the River Jordan under permanent Israeli sovereignty.
2. The second is to have full Palestinian sovereignty over the Jordan Valley area in which there will be Israeli early-warning stations along the Jordan River to serve Israel's strategic and security purposes.

Thus Israel will retain the "right" to have army bases along a narrow strip of land alongside the River Jordan or early-warning stations in the north, central and southern sectors of the river.



With regards to Jerusalem, Netanyahu has suggested the following possibilities:

1. The annexation of the Ma'ale Adumim, Givat Ze'ev, Efrat and Gush Etzion settlements to "Greater Jerusalem".
2. Transferring the Palestinian villages of Al-Walaja, Mount Scopus, Al-Issawiya, Al Sawahreh, Qalandia, Shu'fat, Beit Hanina to Palestinian control.
3. Granting the Arab districts in the city a functioning autonomy, whereby they will enjoy many aspects of control with the exception of the overall security responsibility and foreign relations. The residents of these neighbourhoods will be given the right to vote and stand for Palestinian Authority institutions.
4. The Jewish Quarter and the Armenian Quarter will remain under Israeli sovereignty.
5. Assigning specialized bodies to the management of the religious sites in Jerusalem according to each site's religious significance. This means that Muslims, under the auspices of the Jordanian government, and on behalf of the Muslim and Arab world, will be entrusted with administrating Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Islamic Waqf (endowment) properties. Christians, under the auspices of the Europeans and America, will manage churches and Christian Waqf properties. Israel will be responsible for the Jewish sites in Jerusalem although there is a disagreement on their classification and naming as uniquely "Jewish heritage". This will be followed by the establishment of a tripartite body recognised internationally to coordinate between the religious entities looking after such sites.
6. Paving a corridor from the Palestinian areas in [East Jerusalem](#) to Al-Aqsa Mosque. This would require freedom of movement through streets passing through Palestinian areas which lead to Israeli settlements. Consideration to include such streets as part of the land exchange proposals would be needed.

Palestinian Authority concessions on the exchange of land:

Official documents reveal that the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, has agreed to the principle of land exchange with the Zionist state. In addition, he has given up West Jerusalem and the Buraq ("Wailing") Wall of the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa (the "Temple Mount") and recognised them as Zionist property.

The following document which was sent on 16th July 2000 by Abbas, who was Secretary of the PLO Executive Committee at the time, to the then US President, Bill Clinton, during the Camp David talks, showed that he would accept Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, taking into account the Zionists' interests in the Wailing Wall:



We seek, with your Excellency, to reach a comprehensive peace agreement on all issues. As for the three issues that we talked about, I am ready to go beyond the border if that would form part of a solution that guarantees Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, taking into account Israeli concerns in the Jewish Quarter and the Wailing Wall and ensuring that the city will remain open under a joint cooperation.

1. The exchange of land by value and similarity: We agree to exchange land by value and similarity, but it should be clear that this would not include any spaces comprising our aquifers, and that it does not prejudice the territorial integrity of the West Bank and does not include any Palestinian communities. As we understand the need for border adjustments and as we wish the success for the peace process, I agree to exchange land of value (x %) and likeness, (the exchange rate to be fixed according to the settlements' square space that will be agreed upon).
2. As for ending the conflict, this issue must be accomplished upon applying the final agreement in order to protect our interests, but I am ready to deal with the ideas of your Excellency that reserve our rights.

Washington - [Camp David](#) July 16, 2000

Palestinian Authority concessions on Jerusalem:

The Palestinian Authority has waived its demands to remove all Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, with the exception of Jabal Abu-Ghneim (Har Homa) settlement. It has also expressed its willingness to make unprecedented concessions in the Haram al-qudsī al-Sharif, the Armenian Quarter and Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

The leaked documents that were published recently show a Palestinian offer to give up the Jewish Quarter and a part of the Armenian Quarter in the occupied Old City of Jerusalem, with the rate of exchange of territories between the Authority and the Israelis to be 1-50 in favour of the latter.

According to the minutes of a meeting held on June 15, 2008 attended by Israeli and U.S. negotiators, senior Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qurei said, "This latest proposal could help in the exchange process and the establishment of a Palestinian state." Qurei added, "We proposed that Israel has all the settlements in Jerusalem, with the exception of Jabal Abu-Ghneim (Har Homa)." He said that this is "the first time in the history in which we offer such a proposal although we rejected to do so at Camp David".

The same leaked documents reveal that Saeb Erekat did the same at a meeting on October 21, 2009 with the US envoy George Mitchell: "As to the Old City, it will be under Palestinian sovereignty, except the Jewish Quarter and a part of the Armenian Quarter."



Later in the same meeting Erekat said: “Al-Haram [the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa] can be left for discussion. There are creative ways, such as forming a body or commission, obtaining pledges, for example, not to drill.” The Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Jerusalem also gained its share of attention from the Palestinian negotiators’ climb down according to the secret documents. Qurei told the Israelis, “In the context of exchange of land, I must get an equal area for an area in Sheikh Jarrah.” Clearly, they were prepared to negotiate and bargain for land.

On October 13, 2009 at a meeting with Saeb Erekat, the UN envoy for the peace process, Robert Serry, said that he had met in Jerusalem with the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Salam Fayyad, and told him, “The only thing we need is to find an honourable solution for the Sheikh Jarrah families: giving them a sum of money to hire new homes in the same area, Jerusalem.” He added that he had talked about that with the Jordanians.

“Fayyad is the one who has to pay that money to the families, not you nor the Jordanians,” said Erekat. “Of course,” Serry replied.

Israel had expelled Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah in the heart of occupied East Jerusalem; around 550 residents remain under the threat of expulsion from Jerusalem to this day. There is an Israeli plan to build two hundred new housing units for Jewish settlers in the neighbourhood.

According to [Erekat](#), in return for the Palestinian offers the Israelis refused to discuss Jerusalem; they insist on keeping this outside the negotiators’ remit. This was confirmed by the former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni at a meeting on June 15, 2008 with Qurei and the then US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice: “We told the Palestinians that we will not remunerate them for any land as long as it is part of Israel,” said Livni, referring to East Jerusalem, which Israel has annexed unilaterally and illegally. On January 15 2010, Erekat told Mitchell’s deputy, David Hill, that what the Palestinians had conceded gives the Israelis “the greatest Yerushalayim in Jewish history”. When Hill asked him to be more specific, Erekat said, “You know the paper - the paper that I gave to Daniel - it had been written by President Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) himself.”



Maps of the Palestinian Authority’s concessions on settlements

The Palestinian negotiators provided maps as a basis for their putative state, according to secret notes that were leaked to the media. The maps showed a substantial number of concessions on Jerusalem and West Bank settlements.

On May 4, 2008 the Palestinian delegation, headed by Ahmed Qurei, presented the Israeli negotiators with maps along with an assurance “there is a common interest in retaining some settlements”.

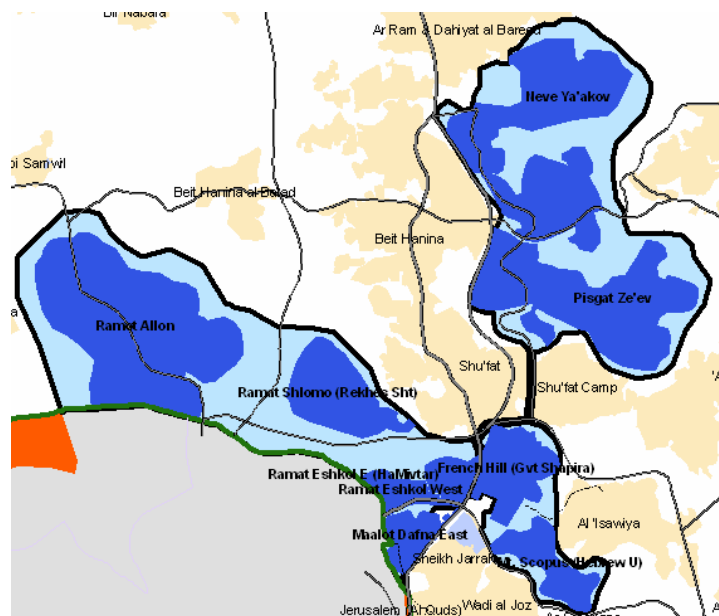
[Map 1, north of East Jerusalem]

Swap in area (3) North Jerusalem:

From Palestine: Area: 15.14 km

of settlers: 136,204

Settlements	# of settlers
French Hill	6,511
Ma’alot Dafne (east)	3,665
Mt. Scopus	1,157
Neve Ya’cov	20,085
Pisgat Ze’ev	42,253
Ramat Eshkol (east)	3,050
Ramat Eshkol (west)	3,368
Ramat Shlomo	15,162
Lamot Alon	



All areas that appear in blue on map 1 are settlements in the north of East Jerusalem. The blue areas represent two large blocs in which more than 136,000 illegal Jewish settlers live. The Palestinian negotiator, Samih Al-Abd, who explained the maps during the meeting, suggested that the two blocs should be linked by a bridge.

The orange area represents territories inside Israel over which it was proposed the Palestinians should have control, within the framework of an exchange of land between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

[Map 2, south of East Jerusalem]

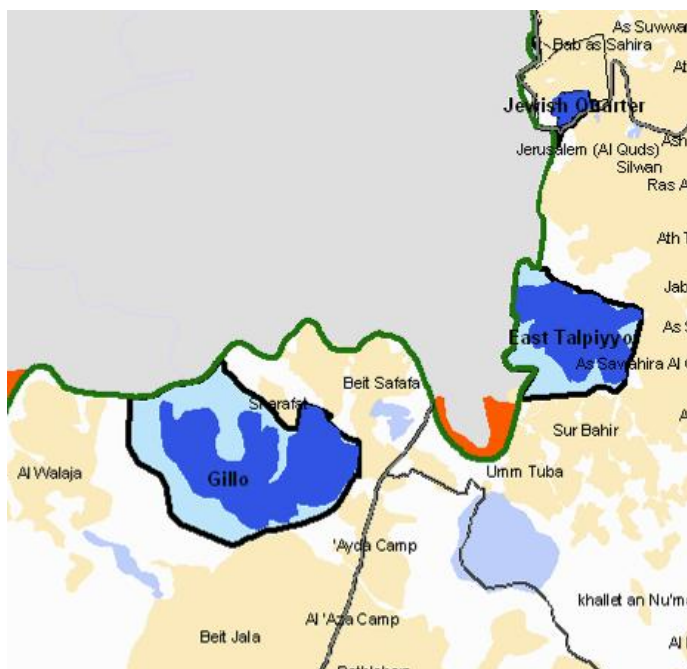
Swap in Area # (2) south of Jerusalem:

From Israel: Area 0.37 km

From Palestine: Area: 6,68 km

of settlers: 41,504

Settlements	# of settlers
East Tel Piot	11,962
Jewish Quarter (Old City)	2,507
Gilo	



The same thing seems clear in the south of Jerusalem (map 2) so that the land exchange ratio, according to figures accompanying the Palestinian maps, becomes 1:50.

[Map 3]



The exchange of land came in the context of the talks about borders, including Jerusalem, to show the overall map of the West Bank as it appears in map 3.

The black on this map represents Palestinian land, a significant proportion of which is located in or around Jerusalem. The Palestinian negotiator showed a willingness to concede this land to the Israelis, in return for land in other areas, most notably – in Bisan in the north, and another town to the east of Gaza.

Maintaining the status quo

With regard to the settlements in the West Bank, Saeb Erekat told a meeting with Ahmed Qurei and Tzipi Livni on May 4, 2008 that Jewish settlers ought to be “full-rights citizens in Palestine”, comparing their status within the putative Palestinian state with the status of “Israeli Arabs”. At the same meeting, Qurei called for “any settlers who want to live under Palestinian sovereignty [to be] subject to Palestinian law.” At a meeting attended by Israeli, Palestinian and American representatives on June 15, 2008 Qurei praised the idea of “keeping the Ma’ale Adumim settlement under Palestinian sovereignty; it can then be a model of cooperation and coexistence”. Tzipi Livni rejected such proposals saying, “How can I provide security for Israelis who live in Palestine? They [[Palestinians](#)] would kill them the next day.”

The maps show that Israel has annexed 15.1 square kilometres from the north of Jerusalem in which 136,000 illegal settlers live. The Palestinians received nothing in return. The same trend can be seen in the south. The Palestinian Liberation Organization has provided concessions for 6.68 square kilometres, occupied by 41,500 settlers. Accordingly, the total land that the PLO has relinquished in Jerusalem is 22km². In waiving its control over this territory, the PLO has legitimised the presence of 177, 500 settlers on Palestinian land.

The proportionality of land swaps is 1:50 in Israel’s favour, but even so this has been rejected by Livni even though, according to Erekat himself, “This is the first time in Palestinian-Israeli history that such a formal proposal has been provided, and what we are doing, no one has done for us; neither the Americans nor the Europeans.”

It is clear that whenever the Palestinians have shown extreme generosity in these matters (to the point of recklessness); the Israelis have sought to extract as many concessions as possible in return for giving absolutely nothing. The Israeli position on Jerusalem, for example, has not moved an inch during the negotiations. According to the minutes of an official meeting held November 13, 2007 it was stressed that, “Israel is the state of the Jewish people - and I like to emphasize on the meaning of ‘its citizens’ who are the Jewish people - and that Jerusalem is a united and undivided capital for Israel and the [Jewish people](#) over 3007 years.”



Demography - the main Israeli obsession

All Israeli plans and proposals entail population as well as land exchange solely in order to get rid of the “1948 Palestinians” who are Israeli citizens; this forms part of the demographic campaign “to preserve the purity of the Jewish state”. This is being led by Israeli officials of various political affiliations and is part of the state’s “Judaisation” policy. Any future peace deal must ensure Jewish demographic superiority inside Israel.

When Tzipi Livni was Foreign Minister during Ehud Olmert’s premiership (2006-09), her proposal to “transfer” parts of the triangle to Palestinian control, she was consistent with her successor, far-right Avigdor Lieberman’s policy. Israel’s Palestinian citizens make up 20% of the total population and are regarded by politicians of all hues as a “threat” to the state. As a result, many have made similar proposals in order to reduce the number of Palestinians living inside Israel.

The Triangle as a key to the Judaisation of Israel

In 1948, those Palestinian Arabs who remained in the nascent state of Israel after 700,000 of their fellow Palestinians had been ethnically cleansed from their land, congregated in three main areas of historic Palestine: the Galilee in the north; the Triangle in the midlands; and the Bedouin in the Negev Desert in the south. Around 10% of the population of the major coastal cities in Israel are also “Israeli Arabs”.

The Triangle did not form part of the Jewish state as recommended by the UN’s partition plan in November 1947 (Resolution 181). It was annexed to Israel through the armistice agreements between Israel, Jordan and the Arab countries in December 1948. This region extends along the Green Line between Kafr Qasim in the south and the village of Salem on the outskirts of Marj Ibn Amer. It is about 200km² and has a predominantly Arab population. More than 60 percent of its land has been converted into so-called “state territory”, covering a mainly Arab population earmarked for ethnic cleansing following the Kafr Qasim massacre by the Israeli army in October 1956. The Israelis hoped that this massacre would intimidate the population and push them to leave the country voluntarily. Today, Kafr Qasim’s population is estimated at more than 200,000. Because of its proximity to the [June 1967](#) border, there is a plan to incorporate this region into the Palestinian state without consulting the people affected.

What do the “Israeli Arabs” think of the land exchange plans?

As the primary intended victims, it is interesting to know what the Palestinian citizens of Israel think of the land exchange plans. The Chairman of the High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens, Mohammed Zidan, is adamant that the various movements, parties and political actors in the Palestinian districts all refuse to accept the idea of exchanging territory and population between Israel and an independent Palestinian state. According to Zidan, “We will not accept the severing of the Triangle from the Palestinian interior. No one can impose a project on us. We will defeat this project and will not deal with it even if a convention has been signed to



activate it. We had previous meetings with the Palestinian side in addition to other meetings that brought us together with President [Mahmoud Abbas](#), where we asked him clearly not to deal with the 1948 Palestinians as items to be negotiated away.” Sheikh Raed Salah, the head of the Islamic movement in Israel confirmed in an interview with Middle East Watch that all political movements in the 1948 Palestinian territories, and the masses, reject land and population exchanges. They all, he said, see this as “planned deportation”; similar to what happened during the Nakba.

Dr. Jamal Zahalka is a member of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) representing the “Arab Gathering”. He believes that Israeli insistence on transfer and exchange is intended to weaken the resolve of the Palestinian minority in Israel, eliminate its political role and marginalise its impact on decision-making circles in Tel Aviv. “Hence, this deal cannot be accepted at all.” The city of Umm al-Fahm, he added, is not an acceptable trade-off for the city of Jerusalem. “If they insist on this idea, let it be based on the 1947 [UN partition plan] borders, which means that Israel should withdraw from vast areas in the region of Galilee and the Triangle, which should then be annexed to the Palestinian state.”

Abd al-Hakim Mufeid, an academic and Palestinian [scholar](#) who lives in Umm al-Fahm, says that in principle he does not oppose living in a Palestinian state, or under any Arab ruler, but he notes that the Israelis want to get rid of the demographic burden which is posed by the Palestinian minority. “Since the Zionist movement began implementing its settlement project,” he said, “it has invoked the principle that it must capture the largest area of land with the least number of Arabs on it. This rule impels the political leadership in Israel “to put forward the idea of land swaps”.

It is obvious that land exchange could not and cannot proceed, if for no other reason than that the Palestinians are unable to agree on what “land exchange” actually is. The president of the Palestinian Authority has no authority to hand over the land of Palestine to Israel. Palestine's borders are defined by the Palestinian National Charter of 1968 and any decision affecting this has to be determined by the Palestinian National Council elected to represent the 11 million Palestinians. Such a decision by the National Council does not exist. In addition, the Palestinians in the occupied territories, including “1948 occupied Palestine” have agreed that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the blockade on Gaza must end, and have reaffirmed the refugees’ right of return. Both are underpinned by international laws and conventions, and no one has the right to waive these requirements.

The Arab initiative does not emphasize the right of return and leaves it subject to Israel’s approval. This opens the door to several years’ worth of negotiations to agree on a “fair solution” to the refugee issue. This contradicts the fact that the right of return is an inalienable, legal and individual right. International law has already defined that a “fair solution” will be the return of Palestinian families to their homes and land from which they were expelled. There is no room for negotiation on this issue and attempts to have this up for discussion should be seen as attempts to remove the refugees’ right.



Waiving sovereignty over territory in Jerusalem and the Old City of Jerusalem is a heinous crime that cannot be forgiven, no matter how many Arab and international bodies are delegated to manage the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa. If international law rejects such a plan, who can claim to represent the soil of the land and accept it? Israel owns neither the land it intends to swap from the west of the Green Line nor the land on the east which it wants to keep; occupation does not confer ownership. The exchange of land is a clear violation of the Palestinian National Charter, which stipulates that the land of Palestine is an indivisible unit. Ironically, the British mandate itself states that Palestine is an indivisible unit; are the Palestinian negotiators less patriotic than Britain, which brought the Zionists to Palestine in the first place?

What is being planned today is a rehash of failed plans which all parties seem to have agreed on except the most important party; namely those who have been dispossessed - the people of Palestine. This new formula is an Israeli creation which hopes to be something for all people: the exchange of land, a nominal Palestinian state, the Geneva Initiative, the Arab initiative and US blessings. They are forgetting one thing, however: after sixty-two years of resistance, the Palestinian people, who are the stakeholders, locked-out of the discussions, will not accept the dismissal of their legal rights.

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